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FOR AF/SPG

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TAGS: [MASS](#) [MCAAP](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: SLA COMANDERS CALL FOR A SINGLE LEADER

REF: 05 KHARTOUM 01654

Classified By: P/E Chief E. Whitaker, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) (Note: this is a re-transmission of 05 Khartoum 01654 to reflect redrafting and reclassification of para 4 per AF/SPG request. End note.) Summary: The lack of a clearly defined leader at the top of the SLA has left field commanders with divided loyalties, hungry forces, and time on their hands. Without an identifiable and decisive leader, many SLA units have reverted to being clan and tribal militias that rob convoys for food and loot. The military leadership has not led, and subordinate commanders are beginning to grumble. Field commanders lack clear guidance on how to run the areas under their control; local governance is spotty. Despite Abdul Wahid's long absence from Darfur, Mini Minawi has not yet been able to fully consolidate control under his lead. Still, Mini appears to us to be the front-runner in the SLA leadership sweepstakes. End Summary.

Divisions Widening

¶2. (C) Poloff spoke with field commanders and staff officers at all levels in early October. Commanders from all three regional commands said the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) was divided, and that the divisions were widening. The primary division, between groups loyal to Secretary General Mini Minawi and Chairman Abdel Wahid al Nur, run more or less straight along tribal lines and divide the SLA vertically between Zaghawa and Fur/Massalit. But several leaders said there is also a growing divide between field commanders and the political leadership. This rift has widened in the past few months, dividing the SLA horizontally between fighters and expatriate supporters. There is a tribal dimension here, too. Many SLA field commanders are Zaghawa. One North Darfur commander explained to us that he and his men take the risks fighting for freedom while the expatriates and the politicians live well in Europe and in Abuja. The fighters, he said, have so far seen no reward for their sacrifice. This divide is mirrored at the senior levels of the SLA, but taking a few commanders to Abuja may have helped to mend that rift.

¶3. (C) The lack of a clearly defined leader at the top of the SLA has left field commanders with divided loyalties, hungry forces, and time on their hands. In recent months, the absence of large-scale fighting means that regional commanders have only limited control of subordinate forces, many of which have reverted to the control of their tribal and clan leaders. In the relative calm of the past few months, the SLA concentrated on consolidating its position vis-a-vis the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in South Darfur and moving its general headquarters back to Jebel Marra from Berengil (South Darfur), but done precious little rebuilding or training.

Political and Structural Questions

¶4. (SBU) Hassan Salah, chief of intelligence for the SLA General Command, discussed his senior commanders at the regional and sub-regional level, and referred to Chief of Staff Jedou Izza (aka Thagir) as a valiant fighter.

¶5. (C) Bokhit Abdul Karim, a Southern Area commander who may now be deputy to Juma Hagar, said that the political leadership has not explained how the SLA should manage commerce and governance in the areas its controls. This leaves lower-level commanders to make these decisions on their own, often with mixed results. With no standardized governance policy, there is no uniformity among areas controlled by different clans.

"The Cat's Away"

¶6. (C) Across Darfur, field commanders continue to raid humanitarian and commercial convoys for food and loot. This is gradually becoming a commercial activity replacing traditional forms of livelihood. A Zaghawa commander in South Darfur told us that if Mini called the SLA to war, all of the clans would follow him. But with no clear leader and little guidance, control of the tribal and clan militias has reverted to traditional leaders. Government of Sudan security forces have closed many commercial routes into SLA held areas, so the people, both civilian and rebel forces, are hungry.

¶7. (C) Commander Omaru, the senior SLA commander in the Jebel Marra, said that until Mini and Abdel Wahid solve their problems and one of them takes charge, commanders would continue to run amok. "When the cat's away..." he said.

Comment: Most Commanders Appear To Support Mini

¶8. (C) The complaints from the field cross tribal and regional lines. The commanders with whom we spoke said that they want and need a decisive leader. Cease Fire Commission member Colonel Abdou Abdallah Ismail told us that the field commanders would not follow a political leader they cannot trust. Abdou is Fur and would, according to the conventional wisdom, align himself with Abdel Wahid. However, he said that Abdel Wahid is considered by many to be militarily weak.

A Zaghawa staff officer said that Abdel Wahid "ran like a girl" in the early days of the fighting. Abdel Wahid's extended absence from Darfur and poor reputation among field commanders would seem an onerous handicap. So, if we were handicapping the race, we would have to say that Minawi seems to be the front-runner. Nonetheless, Mini has thus far proven unable to unite the SLA under his leadership even with Abdel Wahid out of the country. Abdel Wahid was scheduled to return to Darfur on October 20 and immediately begin consultations with his supporters. Minawi's SLA leadership conference in Darfur, tentatively scheduled for October 26-28 could be a decisive event, perhaps even a showdown between the two.

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